

PEA RIDGE

1919-1931



My childhood memories
in the west Tennessee country

J. Marshall Crews




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*Marshall
Best wishes*



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Acknowledgements

My having been born and reared in a log house with primitive facilities and comforts has been of interest to my children: Leslie, Phyllis, Marsha, and Jimmy. I have attempted to recall some of the life and customs in my home. The setting is a community about eight miles east of McKenzie, Tennessee, called Pea Ridge. The time of this narrative is the 1920's and early 1930's.

My daughter Leslie has been of invaluable help with her expertise in computers. My dear wife Margaret has encouraged me and given me support, as she always has during our marriage. I thank my family, wife, daughters, son, sons-in-law, and grandchildren.

One further note: the buildings in the photographs are not the actual buildings of my narrative but are reasonable facsimiles; however all of the photographs are of the Pea Ridge area, the location of my childhood.

JMC



Pea Ridge

The locale of my experiences as a boy was a farm eight miles from the nearest town and well isolated from progressive society and its influences. The 166-acre farm was part of a 644-acres grant from the king or governor of earlier times. Most of the farm was in wooded acres and unavailable for farming. The main structure was the old log house made of hewn logs at least 12 inches square. The land was not very fertile; in fact, people said it was too poor to grow peas- hence the name "Pea Ridge." The absence of a radio or television, along with the inclement weather, isolated us from our neighbors. We sat beside the fireplace in straight chairs that Daddy had made and we could hear and record in our minds the various sounds of the seasons. We listened for the sounds of Nature with interest and comfort knowing that all was well and the Lord was in His house. We stopped to smell the roses.

We never started the rush to beat time.

Early morning sounds were:

The screech of the hawk descending on its prey

The hollering of one neighbor to another

The singing of the birds launching their day's labor for food

The crowing of the rooster to awake all near and far

The sound and smell of the coffee pot brewing the strong awakener

The snorting of the horses in their stables

The mooing of the cows with full udders

The squealing of the hogs hungry for their food

The foghorn in a hunter's call to the dogs

Our Home

The house was a rectangular two-story log structure with two rooms on each side of a "dog trot." We lived in the bottom rooms which were about thirty feet square. One of the rooms was adjacent to a lean-to kitchen. The other downstairs room served as a "company room" and had no heat except for the times when we had company. Each downstairs room was heated by a large fireplace approximately five feet high and six feet wide. Each winter we had to cut hickory and oak wood with the biggest pieces serving as backlogs. Bedtime and arising times were very early, and the coals were covered with ashes at bedtime and were still glowing when we got up. The heat was uneven so that we went to bed warm and woke up freezing.

Toilet facilities consisted of an outhouse in the backyard, and a bucket of water and wash pan in the kitchen. Our weekly baths were taken in a washtub in the backyard during the dark nights of the summer and in the kitchen area during the winter. Mother had a piece of linoleum on the kitchen floor. You have never lived unless you have stepped barefoot on a linoleum floor at a temperature of 10-15 degrees. It is a sure cure for drowsiness in the morning!

The hallway between the rooms was twelve feet wide and served as a cooling area during the hot summer nights and as a wood storage area during the winter. Backlogs were sometimes so large that they were pulled into the hallway and rolled across the room into the fireplace. The chimney was made of sandstone and caulked with clay mud. Holes in the caulking were prevalent and

sometimes caused houses to burn. The walls were made of logs and caulked with clay mud. They made the rooms cool in the summer and warm in the winter. The only fans available were a few cardboards from the funeral house.

Our water came from a spring at the foot of the hill upon which the house stood. Daddy saw an apparatus one time and came home and made it in his shop. With a windlass, a carriage was lowered down the hill on a wire cable. It tripped over the spring and the bucket fell into the spring. The bucket filled and was drawn back up the hill by the windlass. On washdays we hitched the horses up to a "slide" (similar to a snow sled) and hauled the water from another accessible spring. The clothes were washed in an iron wash pot with homemade lye soap. After wearing the same clothes for one week, much boiling and soap were required!

Furniture was not bought from a furniture store in those days- it was made by my daddy from available woods. Chairs, tables, cupboards, and beds were the chief pieces for the household. He also made rolling pins, butter molds, spoons, forks, paddles, and churn dashers. One of the most interesting items he made was a lock for the smokehouse door. He was very adept at looking at something and then duplicating it without seeing the original again.

We had a barn which was also made of logs. It had stalls for the mules on one side of a hallway, and the corncrib and hayloft on the other. The cows took cover in the hallway during bad weather. Livestock was well cared for because our lives and well-being depended upon their welfare. For example, a good farmer never let his

livestock go hungry. Many visits were cut short to feed the hogs and milk the cows.

The chimney of our log house was made of sand rocks cemented together with clay mud. The clay would dry and cracks could be seen in the chimney. This house in which I was born burned in later years when sparks went through the cracks and set the wood on fire.

Fires

There was no way to extinguish a fire once it got started. The only procedure to follow was to be sure everyone was out of the house and then carry everything you could out of the house for as long as possible. Bucket lines were formed from a pond if possible and were always ineffective. Needless to say, people were always afraid of fire and practiced the necessary precautions.

A home destroyed by a fire usually meant that the family lost everything they owned. Therefore, neighbors immediately made plans to re-establish the home.

First they cut trees, sawed them into lumber, and began building. This expression of love and care was known as a barn-raising. Everyone always had an extra piece of furniture that they gladly gave to the unfortunate family. Those good Christian people found beds, chairs, tables and stoves even though they deprived themselves. There was no "keeping up with the Jones's" because the Jones's were all of us.

The concern and actions of the neighbors during these crises exhibited the highest ideals of man- the love of one for another.

Berry-Picking Time

When spring was in full bloom, and the warm days so exciting, there came a few days of cool weather. This cool snap was known as "Blackberry Winter," and was about the time the plants were in full bloom. To a young boy, these were days of elation since we had shed our long itchy underwear that we had worn all winter. Incidentally, the day of the shedding was one that we looked forward to for many days with great anticipation and relief. Parting company with that flannel was a day to be celebrated! I always wished I could wear the underwear of the mesh cloth type, but it was willed that that would never happen. So much for the unpopular clothing- it takes its place in the annals of time and hopefully will never be repeated.

The wild blackberries would ripen during the summer and we would pick them and Mother would make the most delectable jellies, to be eaten all year. But this savory food was bought for a price. We would gather the berries from the vines with thorns among a hot bed of red bugs. Each bug would fulfill its mission of making an itchy bump on the skin, which would last for months. We fortified ourselves by rubbing kerosene on our ankles and arms- we attained only partial success. Visions of blackberry jelly or jam danced through our heads, minimized the pain, and kept us looking for morsels.

During late summer and early fall, another catastrophe struck: we had to pick butter beans! The dust of the dry season plugged my sinuses and gave me a headache when I hit the bean patch! This my parents would not believe, and gave me no sympathy or relief. The vines grew on

poles leaning in an "X" shape, and my place was inside this tunnel where all the dust settled and a dusty prison formed. My parents didn't believe this discomfort existed, and probably went to their graves with minds unchanged. We had no way to freeze the green butterbeans, so we let them dry and ate them during the winter.

Black walnuts were a nut that we used to make candy and cakes during the winter months. The trees did not grow wild, but were usually found in yards or gardens. The nut was surrounded by a soft shell which stained the hands when they were handled. After removing this outer shell, the nut was usually dried out before its opening. The meat was surrounded by a thick bone-like shell which could be broken only by a hammer, or like object.

Another hardwood tree which tendered its fruit was the hickory tree. There were two kinds: the hard shell and the paper shell nut. The hard shell was very difficult to break open and the fruit was small. The other hickory, the scaly bark tree, had a nut which had a thin shell and was easy to break open. We gathered the walnuts and the scaly barked hickory nuts in the fall, and stored them for eating during the cold winter months.

The chestnut was a tasty nut, but was quite painful to find by a barefoot boy because the nuts were encased in a prickly shell. There were two very large trees on our farm, and the nuts were plentiful until all of the trees died from a blight in the mid- 1930's. The blight covered the entire country and the trees never grew back. Scientists are still trying to grow the tree in laboratories, but to no avail.

Springtime

The wonderful time of the year when:

School would soon be over for the year.

We could shed our itchy underwear and heavy shoes.

We could make our sling shots when we could find the rubber inner tube at the Ford place in town.

We had sore toes from stubbing them on tree roots, rocks, and all protruding articles. (The cure for nails stuck in the foot was kerosene and hot salty water.)

We saw the grass in spring seeming to say, "Here I am, your world is green, bright and anxious for the next dawn."

We rolled and played in the grass of the fields and the leaves in the woods.

We saw the buds straining to burst out after being cooped up all winter, seeming to say, "Let's go another round."

We saw the sparrow flitting about, building her nest for the little ones soon to be born.

We saw Daddy breaking the ground with a two-horse turning plow and the birds following him in their search for worms.

We heard Daddy and our neighbors discussing their plans for planting the fields.

Birds and melodies that man cannot approach.

The animals were decked out in their spring coats of color which no artist can reproduce.

It was the time when man and the soil renewed their love and respect for each other. The soil seemed to say, "Here I am, old friend, rested over the long cold winter and ready for you to tend me with your loving care."



Food and Farming

When a family had a fire or any other kind of trouble, the community became concerned about their welfare. Vegetables, slabs of meat, clothing and free labor were given from the heart. Any mention of pay would have been an insult. If a man became ill and could not cultivate his crop, then the neighbors would take a day off and all come in and get the crop plowed and free of grass. During all these work days , the women brought food by the tons, and spread a feast in the front yard in the shade of the trees. Ham, sausage, bacon, beef, hot biscuits, cornbread, beans, peas, okra, turnips, greens, fried chicken, corn on and off the cob, jam, jelly, preserves, honey, potatoes, all cooked to such a succulent flavor, were among the home grown foods. Needless to say, everyone ate heartily. Yet very few men were

overweight, because then the workday began at daylight and ended at dark.

Besides doing heavy housework without gadgets, the women worked in the fields. They hoed the crops in the spring, and picked cotton and dug potatoes in the fall. Canned vegetables were nonexistent: they picked the peas, butterbeans, etc. when they were dry, and put them up to eat during the winter. Corn ground into meal was the only way we could use the grain during the cold days of winter. Apples and peaches were peeled and put on a tin roof until shriveled and dry and then put up for the colder months. Plums, wild blackberries, apples and peaches were used to make delicious jams and jellies. I have never seen anything in the grocery stores equal to the tastes of these delicacies.

I remember Mother bringing some dish of food from the kitchen into the dining room and saying, "My, I don't know if this is any good or not."

"Why, Miss Lona, this is delicious," the guest would exclaim.

"Well," Mother would reply, knowing all the while that it would melt in your mouth.

She made this comment because she knew that if one wanted to separate himself from the circle of the community, all one had to do was to be a braggart. Humility was a virtue that was honored and incessantly practiced. It was the nature of these people.

During my early childhood there was no such thing as a farm tractor. We did all the farming with a pair of mules. The ground was broken up with a two-horse turning plow, and disked with a disc-harrow. The cotton

and corn were planted by planters drawn by a single mule. If a farmer's plough broke, he would borrow one from a neighbor while his was being repaired. The absence of fertilizer and constant use of the land required some of it to be "rested" (not used for a few years). During the winter months, trees would be cut from new ground, wood could be cut for the fireplace, and the brush would be burned and a "new ground" would be made. I can still feel the pain of those plow handles hitting me in the ribs and stomach when the plow hit a root. It took at least three years of cultivation for the roots to rot. This new land was always planted in corn since it was the most easily plowed. When the rain was plentiful, the crab grass seemed to get as high as the corn and cotton. Daddy did not like to hoe, so my sister, granddaddy, mother, and I had to perform that task. After we removed the grass from the row, Daddy would plow the ground, the grass would return, and the process would start over again. The happy time came when the crop was "laid by." This was the time when the crop was so high that damage would be done to the roots when plowing.

During the spring and early summer, each day was a workday except Sunday. Sunday was a day of rest and visitation for the elders and of play for the youngsters. Sunday breakfast was the big meal of the week, and would usually consist of: eggs; bacon, sausage, fried chicken, beef, or ham; red-eye gravy; and hot biscuits with various jellies, jams, honey and molasses. Dinner, the main meal, consisted of mainly vegetables, cornbread, and fried chicken or beef or pork. If we children put too much on our plates and decided we weren't hungry, then

our plates were put in the cupboard, and that is what we had for the evening meal.

Mother cooked the meals on a woodburning stove, so the summer evening meals weren't usually warmed up. When we had visitors to eat with us on Sundays, we children had to wait until the elders had eaten, the dishes washed and replaced on the table before we could eat. I always thought this was a cruel rule, and I affirmed that my children would be the first to eat.

We had a vegetable garden from which we grew beans, tomatoes, corn, turnips, radishes, potatoes, salads, and other edible fruits. It was very rich land because we kept it covered with compost from the barn. We had no fertilizer for the field crops and had to rely on the compost for any fertilization we did. One exception was the watermelon patch. It seemed as if only a few could grow the large and sweet-tasting watermelon. One farmer could never grow the select melon, but he always tried. He lived on the farm adjacent to another farmer who would grow beautiful specimens without effort. He would prepare, use compost, and tenderly care for the plants. Small, inferior melons were the result, much to his despair. The successful gentleman would seemingly partially prepare the soil, casually plow the ground, and reap the most beautiful fruit. It was a puzzle to the unlucky farmer for as long as he lived.

Laughter was not a frequent mode of expression and was not taught as a remedy for body language. When we sat down at the table, we were told to be quiet and eat. I don't remember conversation at the ordinary meal. When the preacher or other company came on Sundays, the men ate at the first table and did converse. The subject

was always farming, livestock, or food, because that was all we knew. However, the conversation changed if a citizen had committed some deviant act. They were a very forgiving people and would help anyone in need, morally or physically.

Tennessee has always been known for making whiskey, legally or illegally. The illegal trade must have flourished near my home. You could stand out in our yard in the late afternoon, look in almost any direction, and see smoke hissing from a still hidden in the woods. The manufacturing was primitive and without sanitation. They "fired" the cooking pot and the condensing vapor produced the "spirits." The product had the power of an atom bomb! It was raw whiskey at its finest- or worst.

My daddy told me to never go near one of the stills since law officers could jail me if I was caught close by. The Revenuers would make periodic raids and arrest some of these operations. I do remember one of our neighbors being caught and spending a year in jail. He was not disgraced when he came back home; in fact, I remember visiting his home one Sunday afternoon and playing with his son who was my age. (Unknown to our parents, we found the main supply of home brew.) Again the neighbors cared for the man's family while he was in prison. In those days a good person had honesty, integrity, worked hard, cared for his neighbor, and was attentive to his family. No small thing like being caught making illegal spirits would harm his standing in the community.

Mrs. Mann's Salmon Cakes

One of my boyhood friends and I spent the night with the elderly Manns when I was very young. I do not remember anything about how they looked but I do remember their salmon cakes. They were at least six inches in diameter and one inch thick. Mrs. Mann cooked them in a skillet over coals of fire in the fireplace, and they ranked among the most delicious meals I have ever eaten. The hickory smoke put a flavor in them which is indescribable.



Roads and Going to Town

The road system was one of clay dirt and was public, under the county administrators. The privilege of voting depended upon the payment of a poll tax. If you had a team of mules or horses you could work on the roads three days and earn your right to vote. Daddy would take his mules and “scoop” and do his duty each year with no thought of the legality of the requirement.

The crossroads were points of reference people used when giving directions or locations of houses or places. “To get to the Chapel Hill church you go to the crossroads, turn right, and go about two miles, or you may go straight ahead for two miles and come to Rice’s Store.”

The roads were simply wagon tracts in the mud. During the rainy cold season the ruts were “axle deep.” It

was difficult for the mules to pull a fully loaded wagon most of the time.

To get to town, Daddy and I arose at four o'clock on a cold icy morning, ate breakfast, hitched up the mules to the wagon, and set out. We had a kerosene lantern to show us the way during the eight-mile trek. It was very cold, but the excitement of going to town kept me warm. After a seemingly endless time we arrived in town, put our corn in the grist mill to be ground into corn meal, along with the 100 pounds of flour we bought to last us all winter.

We tied the mules to the wagon and they ate the hay we brought along for their lunch. The travel time didn't allow much leisure for shopping but I headed for the store that sold candy and spent my nickel one penny at a time. There was a grocery store, a drug store, three mercantile stores, and a bank, among the few other stores with varying functions. The main attraction was the town square with trees for shade and benches for sitting. It was the social center of the town and where Daddy went to catch up on the welfare of his friends along with the latest local and world news.

Saturday seemed to be the day that preachers came to preach in the square. They preached the hell-fire and damnation philosophy and tried to convert and save all who would listen. After many contortions and much perspiration, they would pass the collection plate and then disappear to the next town to perform their services. Their denominational beliefs were not discussed or disclosed, so it was left for one to wonder about their real commitment. Their dress was impeccable, which may have been proof of their financial success.

After listening to the sermon and seeing old friends, Daddy loaded the meal, flour, and some coffee in the wagon, and we began the long and endless trip home. The excitement of going was equaled by the boredom of returning. But the exhilaration of seeing new things lingered throughout many days that followed. We arrived at home after nightfall, after a sixteen-hour day. The fatigue and boredom of riding soon was replaced by looking forward to the next trip.

It is saddening to look back on these and many other experiences with the realization that they were primitive and will never happen again. It may be that a sadness of life is that we can never relive an experience in its totality. We may repeat the performance but it will always be a repeat, not the original.

My Wardrobe

2 pairs of overalls and one lined jumper ordered from Sears Roebuck in the fall after we sold our cotton at the cotton gins.

1 pair of dress (Sunday) shoes which had to last for years

1 pair of work and school shoes

2 long handle underwear

To have the experience of wearing long underwear near a hot wood burning stove is an experience everyone should have. Result: a miserable, horrible, itch you will always remember.



Swindell School

I believe that my school was named after a Mr. Swindell who gave the land both for the school and the Pleasant Grove Primitive Baptist Church, which was nearby, although nothing was ever recorded to verify the fact. The single room clapboard school building was one and a half miles from our home and we walked to and from each day of the school year. The one teacher taught all eight grades and did a wonderful job. When we weren't reciting, we were studying our books. Spelling matches or "bees" were very frequent and this competition inspired us to succeed. Enough cannot be said of the expertise, competence, and the excellence of this and other similar teachers.

My greatest regret in life has been that I don't remember my mother. She died when I was three years

old and I can't remember her at all. I do know that she was a sweet and lovable person, and I have always loved her. When she died, our household was broken up and we lived with our aunts and uncles. After a while my father married and we moved back to our homestead. My stepmother was so good to us but had one fault- she never laid a hand on us. She should have worn out many switches on us. I was upset and disturbed due to the situation, and found all possible excuses to not go to school each day. I imagined headaches, colds, and flu all too frequently. But one day came a turning point.

The school was an element of the county-supported public school system. The superintendent, with superb vision, hired a retired minister to visit the schools and give the pupils a pep lesson of encouragement. I can't remember how he looked, what he said, or what he did on the day he visited us. I do know that he said or did something that completely turned my life around. From that day on, I attended school with enthusiasm. I attribute this speech to my getting an education and maybe contributing something to the field of education. I believe that the Lord, through the minister, put a silent , unwavering drive in me to try to make something of myself.

My early days were not filled with visions of success and accomplishments. I remember seeing a contrail of an airplane, and it made me wonder what an airplane looked like and how it stayed up in the air. I saw a passenger train and questioned how it looked on the inside.

The schoolhouse was a small rectangular building with no lights, water, or heating system. If a rare night meeting was required, light came from lanterns. Water

was carried in buckets from a spring at the foot of the hill about a quarter of a mile away. An old wood burning stove, which released smoke through a chimney in the roof, provided heat. The roof was made of wood shingles made by the use of a froe. I well recall the roof catching on fire more than once, which required the pupils to run to the spring for water to quench the flames. I don't believe the old building ever burned completely, but died of old age.

As I said before, we walked to and from school regardless of weather conditions. We carried our raincoat and overshoes almost every day along with the school books which became shopworn with use. One day my sister forgot her overshoes and sent me back to the school to get them. (My sister took charge of me and my conduct, to which I often rebelled!) When I got to the school it was locked and the teacher had gone home. I decided to open a window and crawl in. When I jumped up to grasp the inside sill of the window, it fell across my neck and shoulder. I hung there with no chance of getting in or out. I hollered and kicked the outside wall with all my ability, but nothing happened. The Lord place His hand on me that day and caused my cousin to happen to drive by in his wagon at that time. He would not have noticed me if his old dog had not approached and vigorously wagged his tail at me. I felt my cousin's hands release the window and lift me inside the building. I was so young that I didn't dwell upon the seriousness of the near-fatal accident, but I have silently thanked my cousin and the Lord many times during the ensuing years. The cousin happened to be the husband of my wonderful teacher!

The school-day schedule was rather exacting. We

reported at 8:00 and “recited” our reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, spelling, and history throughout the day. We had a morning recess of fifteen minutes and one of similar time at in the afternoon. Lunch (our dinner) was from 12:00 - 1:00. This usually consisted of ham and biscuits and a piece of cake or sweet potato. We boys quickly ate and spent the remaining time running through the woods. We didn’t run after anything; we simply ran for the exercise. There were no toilet facilities at the school. We boys went across the road and into the woods at the front of the schoolhouse. The girls went into the woods in back of the building.

Discipline was not a problem for the teacher in those days. It started at home and ended at home. If we got a whipping at school, then we got another one when we got home. No questions were asked, no useless defense presented- if the teacher said we misbehaved, then her word was good enough for Daddy. He tendered the whipping with vigor. There was no talk convincing me to do better - just, “Don’t do that again!”

Box Suppers

One of the social events at the school was the box supper. The women in the community would bake cakes and pies and put them in a box and the men would bid on their price. The event became interesting when a young man wanted to buy the one his sweetheart cooked. No one was supposed to know which box belonged to which girl, but agitators somehow found out and ran the bid up to extreme prices and then let the suitor win.

Sometimes the children recited poems and sang. After

the food was sold, everyone ate and sampled the other's cake until all were in a "food stupor"! At the PTA meetings, the men would discuss the physical condition of the building and make plans to repair it. After being fed and entertained, the men would hitch up the mules and we would go home in the wagon, well-fed and happy.



The Church

The Pleasant Grove Primitive Baptist Church was near the schoolhouse. The outside walls of the structure were made from oak in a horizontal style. This horizontal siding was painted white and did not peel over the years as most paint does nowadays. All of the lumber used in any dwelling in those days had to be cut, sawed into lumber, and sun-dried for three to four years before using. When a nail was driven into it, the resiliency was equivalent to concrete.

The roof was made of chestnut or oak shingles and of the A-frame type. The chestnut lumber was easily split and light in weight. It also required little time to dry. The interior walls were of tongue-and-groove oak, which dated the structure as being later than the log houses.

The church had one door and four windows and they had no decorative trim. Seating was provided by benches

consisting of one straight for the seat and another for the back..Needless to say, they were not conducive to sleeping during the sermons!

Sunday was a busy day both at home and at church. The worship day began at our house with a flurry of activity. My itchy all-wool trousers and white shirt were laid out for me to wear, despite all my complaints. Mother would fry a chicken or ham and some vegetables, combined with something that she thought to be special in taste, and this full basket would be her share of “dinner on the grounds.” Daddy would hitch the mules to the wagon, and we all rode to the church, arriving at 10:00. After securing the mules to the wagon and giving them plenty of feed, Daddy joined the men under the shade of the trees to discuss the crops, health, and the welfare of each other and of the community. We boys would take off for the woods, chasing each other in spite of our clean, itchy garments. We weren’t really chasing each other-we were just running. It was also a good time to find ripe blackberries, grapes and grapevines, from which we would swing from hill to hill We would always end up with soiled clothes and mothers’ scorn.

The men talked until around 11:00. Then the preacher shook hands with them. If they could afford it, the men placed a one dollar bill in their hands and gave it to the preacher in the handshake. No request was ever made for money and no one ever knew who gave or who didn’t. If the building needed a wood stove or firewood for heat, then the congregation provided it.

The women were already in the church (along with the men who had good voices) to sing until around 11:00. One of the most popular songs was Amazing Grace.

There were no pianos or other musical instruments in the church, so all the singing was acapella.

The leaders of the church were men and they sat on one side of the front end of the church. Their wives sat opposite and separate on the other side of the pulpit. The congregation sat in the normal way, facing the pulpit.

Brother Philip was the pastor and was the most saintly man I have ever known. He practiced his faith in every respect and was loved by all of us. He had no notes or written references- he just opened the Bible and began to preach. He would build up to a sing-song fashion and deliver this message in this mode.

The Primitive Baptists based their faith on Paul's letter to the Corinthians in which he tells them, "By faith are you saved and not by works alone." Brother Philip began his sermon by the reading of scripture, and this verse was usually read or referred to in every sermon. (They had a running debate with the Campbellites, and this verse was their supporting quotation.) The sermon lasted from two to three hours, at which time we children were completely famished.

Then the women spread the food on long tables. Chicken, cooked by all methods, and pork were the meats. Among other dishes were: peas, beans, okra, greens, corn on and off the cob, turnips, sausage, and cornbread. Pecan pies, sweet potato pies, egg custards, blackberry pies, cherry pies, apple pies, chocolate pies, and cakes of all descriptions graced the table and received compliments from all. After an hour of eating, we loaded the wagon and went home, with the old folks filled with the Holy Spirit and the children with food.

The Primitive Baptist Church strongly believed in

predestination, and that we are elected to be saved from the beginning of time. You joined the church by invitation and not by your request. Standards of conduct were rigid and were adhered to or the body took some action. One member was tried in absentia, not for any one action, but for his general conduct. He was found guilty and dismissed from the church roll. The congregation was ruled by an elderly gentleman who did not value anyone else's opinion, and the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

New members were baptized by immersion in the local creek. The winters were so cold that these baptisms were done only in warm weather..One usually came out of the immersion with an expression of joy which was called "shouting." Although primitive in their customs and rigid in their beliefs, these people were true children of God and good in every way. They communed with God by the soaking of feet, as Jesus did to His disciples. All the members would wash each other's feet with earnest love and devotion.

The good people in that area believed that Sunday was a day set aside for formal worship and neighborly visits and concerns. I remember one Sunday when my two cousins and I agreed to circumvent this duty and arranged to go to the creek and fish. The older cousin assumed the role of the leader and he led us in the art of "hogging." This form of fishing was to crawl along the bank of the stream, reach down and feel for the fish. The area around the fish den was slick from use so the older cousin did the feeling. He came upon a slick area and alerted us to the fact that a big fish was ours for the taking. The next scene shows him kneeling down with a

big water moccasin coming out of a hole in the bank between his feet. So much for fishing on that day!

Not to be deprived of our day of liberty, we decided to swing on some grapevines. Sometimes people would carry the wash pot to the spring of water instead of hauling the water to the house. One such wash pot was carried to the spring over which we boys had a swinging grapevine. We would grasp the vine and swing out over the spring pot, and land on the other hill. On this meteoric day, one of us grabbed the vine and sailed over the scenery. All was going well until in the middle of the swing the vine broke. We immediately descended to ground level barely missing the rim of the 3/4" iron pot. So much for that day's entertainment and frolic! We didn't have a difficult time in gaining a clearer view and reason for the prevailing religious belief of our seniors!

Funerals

Funerals were infrequently conducted by a funeral home. When someone died, the neighbors brought some wood to Daddy's blacksmith shop and he would make a box and they would line it with black velvet. He would never charge for his services. When someone died, he or she would lie in state and be buried as soon as possible. There was no embalming, and people would sit up with the corpse all night. The funeral sermons were very long, and if the bereaved was not emotionally upset, then they did not show love and respect for the deceased. The corpse was lowered into the grave and the dirt was shoveled in the presence of all.

4th of July

We always looked forward to the coming of the month of July. For one reason, the crops had been “laid by” and field work was not so intense. It was a time for hunting, fishing, and playing ball. Our ball was an old unraveled man’s sock wrapped around a core of anything we could find. If the core was round, then the final shape resembled a sphere, but more often- no describable geometric shape. We had no glove so we bare-handed the usually wet, soggy, hard, rock-like projectile. We had four bases of sticks or rocks, and a bat made from hoe handles or any piece of wood. We took turns batting, and the usual team consisted of a pitcher and a hitter. The pitcher would throw the ball and if the hitter missed, he would have to chase it down. If he hit it, he would run around the bases while the pitcher chased the ball. Needless to say, our equipment and playing field were primitive!

On July the fourth people gathered at Rice’s Store for an old-day picnic. Daddy would hitch the mules to the wagon, put in enough hay and feed for their lunch, and we would all go to the picnic. We carried our lunch of ham, chicken, biscuits, beans, jelly, etc., and ate it along with the barbecue. The barbecue consisted of pigs roasted in coals of fire the previous night. Heaven cannot smell any better than that roasting meat over the open fire.

After the usual afternoon baseball game, the old folks would return home from a long, tiring day. The younger ones would have a square dance that evening. A fiddle and a guitar provided the music, and the alcohol spirits

flowed along with the rhythm of the feet. There was one young man who followed the same routine each year: he would get pie-eyed drunk, challenge someone to fight him, get whipped, and go home not remembering any of it.

Summertime

The sounds and sights of a summer night were:

The whippoorwill in its distinctive, clear sound of triumph.

The hoot of the owl, looking for mice near the barn.

The bark of the fox in the far-off woods.

...The rumble of distant thunder, which gave us kids hope that it would rain and be too wet to hoe cotton the next day..(My father never liked to hoe, and we believed he would find every other job as an excuse to put down the hoe. He had a small blacksmith shop, and it seemed as if every time we got started, someone would appear with a broken plow!)

The soft rain that fell on the roof of chestnut shingles, hewn by my father or those before him.

The buzz and bite of an occasional mosquito.

The fast flying martins at dusk.

The glow of the lightening bugs and the wonder about how they made their bodies light up.

The smell of Daddy's Bull Durham cigarette that he had just rolled. He smoked his one cigarette in the front yard after supper. Bedtime came with the darkness, and we all went to bed at the same time.

Pap

My grandfather was a unique personality. He had no formal education but was a master of the interpretation of human conduct. He knew of our actions both before and after they occurred. Grandmother lived on his old farm with him and died before I was born.

Pap had a handlebar mustache and chewed tobacco, spitting in every direction. He was brilliant, and I saw many neighbors come and seek his advice on numerous items. How to trade horses, what to do if a family member was sick, and who to vote for were some examples of his counseling.

He was a Republican ("dyed in the wool") as were most people in that area. In those days the leaders of the county appointed the sheriff. It was the highest paying job in the county, and many wanted it. These leaders offered the position to Pap but he wouldn't take it because he had a problem- he was an alcoholic and he realized that he couldn't be true to his job.

Pap's favorite chair was a straight-back made from hickory wood. The round (rump) was made with a drawing knife and the slats were from a knot-clear limb of the tree. The slats were cut with a froe as were the wooden shingles on the roof of the house. The chair had no rockers, and Pap would "rock" on the four legs, holding my sister and me and singing a lullaby. I can still hear those bumps when the legs hit the floor. His customary statement was, "They say you are spoiled and I am here to 'unspoil' you."

Mr. Kirby

Mr. Kirby was an old man during all the years that I knew him and died without fanfare. I do not know if he was ever married, but he did own a home and had no relatives that I knew. His one claim to fame was his carving of churn dashers and butter paddles from cedar. He would walk everywhere he went and would appear at our doorstep unannounced at any time. It as an accepted fact that he would stay a few days as a visitor and stock the kitchen with paddles and dashers. No pay was asked for or expected. Mother was always relieved to see him leave for another house.

Mr. Henry

Mr. Henry or "Hook", as we called him, followed the same pattern as Mr. Kirby, but he was young enough to work. He would work in the fields or do anything to help, asking nothing in pay, and passing on to another neighbor after a few days. Hook never married but owned a house near us. We kids loved him and enjoyed his visits, although he was a burden for Mother. Everyone was very poor in those days and kind and generous to their neighbor.

The Peddler

One of our most exciting times was when the peddler came by in his wagon pulled by a pair of mules. Mr. McBride was a born salesman, and that is what he did in life. He operated a country store in a community five miles from our home, and would make a trip around the country in his wagon. The wagon was similar to the wagon of the "medicine man," and carried cloth and thread for the women to make dresses, as well as a few groceries. I can still remember the smell from the wagon which was like fresh roses in the springtime.

The wonderful smell was somewhat allayed by the chicken coop he had on the back end of the wagon. Since we did not have money, we would exchange chickens and eggs for the items we bought. A spool of thread and a few yards of cloth made my mother happy for days.

Mr. McBride had a bell swinging from the wagon which constantly rang to attract customers. We always wanted hard candy, but we didn't get it very often because there just wasn't any money.

Uncle Ben

The word "integration" was not in our vocabulary during those days. As my father was a man of very few words, he just said "You be nice to everyone." Ben and Henrietta Haynes and their son were the only Negro family in our community. We called them "Uncle Ben" and "Aunt Henrietta" with respect. Aunt Henrietta worked for a lady as a civil servant but Uncle Ben was

physically unable to work. I well remember the summer afternoons when we sat at his feet under the shade tree at his home and listened to the stories he told. They may or may not have been true, but they were exciting to us. Their son and we white boys played baseball together without any thought of color. Aunt Henrietta worked for a family as a member. After her husband and the lady's husband died, the two women lived together with great love and devotion.

The old people whom the people respected were called "Aunt" and "Uncle" with tenderness and love. If someone was not a good worker and provider, he was referred to as "Old Sam Jones" and not as "uncle". The people of those days had an uncanny way and ability to judge people without injury to their pride. If someone wasn't doing right, an elder "statesmen" would go to him and counsel him. If one proved to warrant force, the men of the community physically whipped him with a buggy whip or like instrument. This was done at night to protect his pride. The people avoided backing anyone into a corner and always gave them room to improve. I do remember that one family was encouraged to move from the neighborhood, but these cases seldom happened.

The Tobacco Salesman

About every two or three months, he would knock at the door during the night saying his car was stuck on the long muddy hill near our home. Daddy would get out of bed, go hitch the mules to the wagon, and pull his car

over the hill onto level ground. The salesman always gave a generous amount of tobacco to Daddy instead of money. If someone asked Daddy how much he owed him, he would always say "Nothing."

Old Gray

Old Gray was a mule who decided on his own when and where he wanted to move. He would sometimes refuse to come out of the stable to go to work. Daddy would whip him until he himself would be fatigued; then all at once Gray would decide to come out of his stall. At times he would be plowing in the middle of a field and decide he would go no farther until he was ready! A mule of these habits was not wanted by the farmers and was easily traded without the recipient knowing the discrepancy.

The Country Store

The country stores were the gathering places on Saturday for baseball games. Teams would come from towns to play the local team, and we usually won. I remember that Daddy would give me a nickel to spend if he had it. I would spend that nickel on at least three trips from the ball game to the store. A penny's worth of candy was equivalent to ten cents worth at the present time.

The favorite pastime of the men at these ball games was to squat under the shade of a tree near the baseball

diamond. They would discuss their crops, livestock, and general farm conditions.

The women would gather at someone's house near the store and discuss cooking procedures (there were no recipes), quilting, and other household duties. I well remember Mother having quiltings. Daddy made a frame of wood to hold the cloth and put it in the "front room." The ladies would use a needle and thread and sew one inch squares with as fine a stitch as you can sew with a sewing machine. The results were beautiful quilts which are certainly valuable antiques today. Many women dipped snuff and would use a can to spit in. I have also seen them use a black gum twig with the end crushed into strands as a toothbrush and as a snuff dipper. In fact such a tool was my toothbrush for many years.

Christmas

Christmas time was not a happy time as we commercially try to make it today. The only spending money we had was for the necessities of life. There were no gifts for our friends or acquaintances except those we made, such as jams, jellies, ham, etc. The weather was too bad for church meetings, and the school socials were held during warm weather. There was no decorated tree, no lights except for the kerosene lantern.

Santa Claus visited us each Christmas and brought one present for each of us if the cotton crop was good enough to afford his visit. One of the most horrible experiences I have ever had was the revelation that Santa was another name for Daddy, and that he would not visit us during the upcoming Christmas Day. My Daddy told me on Christmas Eve! He said, "I just don't have the money to buy anything." The regret and sympathy he experienced in no way compounded to the grief and disappointment that engulfed me. That was the year that I wanted a toy truck like the one they used to work the roads and haul dirt.



Hog Killing Time

Our meat staple was pork, and the only way we could get it was to raise and slaughter our own hogs. We bought four piglets in early spring and let them root around in the orchard. Two months before butchering, we put them up in a small pen and fatten them up.

When the first real cold weather came, usually in November or December, we butchered them and prepared the meat for storage. The butchering day started at about four o'clock in the morning. The first task was to get the water hot in the metal wash pots. The hair on the skin was removed with the hot water and with knives used as scrappers. After the carcass was clean, it was suspended by the rear legs and cut into hams, shoulders, ribs, tenderloin, and meat for sausage. The meat was ground for sausage and put into cloth bags

about two inches in diameter and two feet long. This task was done that day along with rendering lard from the less desirable parts of the hog.

The hams, shoulders, sausage, etc., were put in a large bin in the smokehouse and covered with salt. After three days, the meat was taken out of the salt and hung up in the smokehouse and was saturated with hickory smoke until it was decided safe for keeping. The lard was stored in metal cans for use during the year. Sometimes some of the meat spoiled, but usually stayed good for the year.

The day was a strenuous one, but was accented by a scrumptious lunch. Tenderloin and fresh sausage were delicious, along with the usual cornbread, buttermilk, hot biscuits with jelly, beans, polk salad, turnip greens, and other "just plain eatin'." Some people made chittlins from the digestive tract of the hog, but we never made them. Nothing was wasted except the entrails and the hooves.

Everyone was near exhaustion, but we felt complete in that we were satisfied that we had enough meat to last until the next year. Looking back on my experiences, I see that life was mainly providing food and clothing, and keeping in good health to be able to do it. The most exciting times of our lives were when we saw and communicated with our neighbors in church, school, and in going to town.



Wintertime

Wintertime was when:

The ground seemed to say, "Let me rest awhile, care for me, I am tired from my labor."

The cold and howling winds became the guardians of the resting earth.

The old log house called us to her protection as an old mother hen calls her chicks.

The gentle falling snow covered the ground like a blanket, creating an exciting yet soothing effect. (Daddy would suggest we cut wood for the fireplace and kitchen stove every time it snowed or rained.)

The fox and the rabbit would leave their tracks in the snow and their dens would be revealed.

The song birds flew south and we were left with the crow and a few other birds which we fed with bread crumbs. The ground seemed to say, "Let me keep some of the seeds for the birds which remain with us through the winter."

Darkness came early and light was furnished by a kerosene lamp or lantern. The fireplace gave enough light as we had no recreational books or newspapers to read. The elders read the Bible and we children did our homework. Mother broke the monotony on the weekends by popping popcorn over the fire in a popper made from a screen wire or a pot with a cover.

We heard the cracking of ice on a cold night and the cracking of tree limbs when ice weighed them down.

We heard the crack of burning wood in the fireplace.

We listened to the lope of the horses in their exercises.

We listened to the crunch of snow underfoot when we had to get firewood.

We sat in the homemade straight chairs around the fireplace after supper, and moved them back and forth according to the intensity of the fire.

The cluck of the chickens when a fox or other animal was in the hen house.

The hush and stillness of the cold winter night.

Hollering

People did not live so close together in those days, so one form of communication was hollering. It was a type of expression that not many could accomplish. It might be described as a form of yodel, and each person his own identifying style. One person would yodel and another would answer him during the early morning or late afternoon hours. "That's Lay" or "That's Fred" or "That's Argie" came as the result of identification. If someone didn't answer the holler for a day or two, someone else would check on him in the belief he was sick and unable to answer. There were no telephones, and personal contact was the only way to communicate.

Hot Salty Water

In those early days I never knew what a hospital was. The nearest one was many miles away and if one had to go there, then he never came back alive. Hospitals were the last resort.

There was an elderly physician three or four miles from our home and he would make house calls in his buggy (usually to deliver a baby) and later on in a T-Model Ford. His fees were usually paid with chickens, eggs, hams, etc. I saw him once or twice, and just seeing him almost made me well. He had the magnetic charisma possessed by a very few present-day physicians. His education consisted of one year of medical school with no previous collegiate experience. His greatest fault was his "attachment" to a local married woman. She

frequently needed his services despite her apparent good health!

My father's favorite medicine, and practically the only one, was hot salty water. We were treated for sores, poison ivy, sore places, etc. with hot rags soaked in hot salty water. Remarkably, it usually worked.

Daddy would notch a side of a log with an ax and hew it with a broadax. One day he slipped and fell on the broadax and cut a deep gash over his eye. I was terrified but he went to the house and applied the hot salty water which healed it without any trouble. Today such a wound would require a sedative, sutures, and pain pills by a highly paid surgeon. In those days we had to make do with what we had.

Epilogue

Someone was watching over him in the log house where he was born, in the one-room schoolhouse, and in the woods where the wildlife played. He was happy by himself, but he was not alone. He attended the monthly church service, but often he was hungry, and the preaching was long. ("Dinner on the grounds" was fixed vividly in his mind.) The preacher said that the Lord was with him, watching over him by day and night.

He was running up and down the hills around the church, getting his Sunday go-to-meeting clothes dirty before the service began. (Under the impending discussion with his mother about his clothes, God was

not foremost in his mind.)

As time passed on, the boy became a man, a teacher, an old man. He can still remember the sounds of his youth and how God orchestrated them.

God spoke to him through:

The haughty hoot of the owl near the barn,

The howl of the hound on the hunt and the seeming taunting bark of the fox in reply,

The rushing swoops of the chimney swift,

The dove's low mourning, the caw of the crow,

The songs of the mockingbird, sweet and strong, echoing the calls of other birds,

The rusty bark of the squirrel at play, and calling his mates,

The crack of the burning wood in the fireplace, and popcorn popping over the open fire,

The crunch of the new fallen snow when there were visitors in the night,

The smell of fried chicken on Sunday mornings,

The scent of the honeysuckle and the fresh-cut hay,

The giggle of the youth at box suppers when a beau
bought the cake of his friend,

The calm of the falling darkness resembling the
soothing words of the mother, "Hush, my darling, go to
sleep now, it will soon be morning."

The crow of the rooster boasting of his vitality and
excitement over a new dawn.

Dear Father, thank you for the wonderful gifts you have
given us, the gift of love, your watchful care, and the
great beauty of our world.



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